



Food Security in Canada – Indigenous Communities

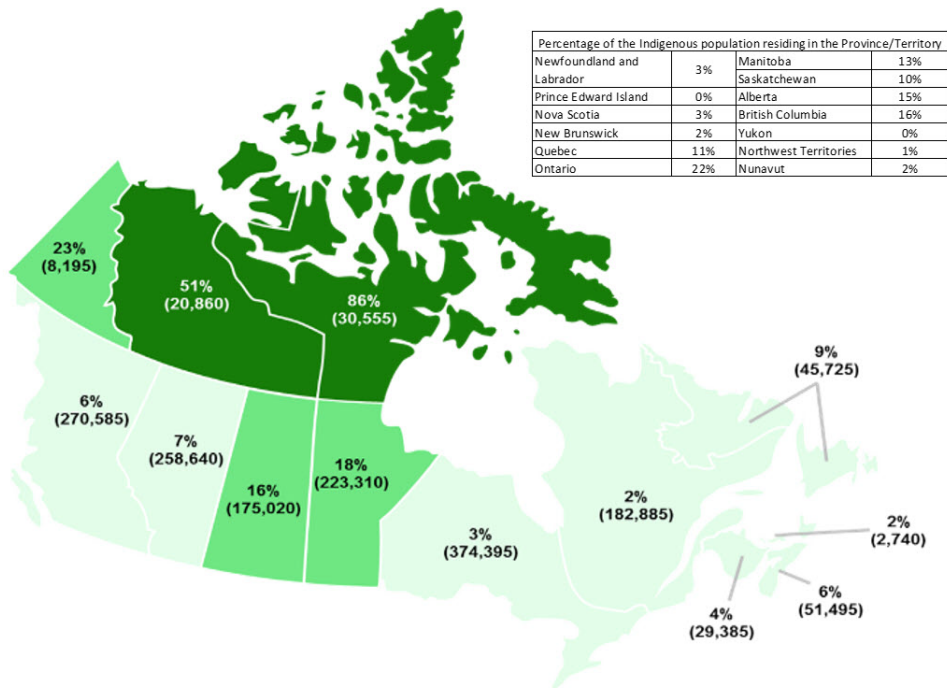


Nancy Ma, NM
Nutrition Services Consultant

The right to adequate food is an internationally recognized human right. Food security as defined by the 1996 World Food Summit is the condition in which “all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”. ¹

Unfortunately this is not a reality for many Canadians. Food security remains a longstanding and on-going concern for many northern and Indigenous communities. Food means more than just nourishment for the body; it is significant to one’s social, cultural, and spiritual well-being in keeping with Indigenous traditions and beliefs. ²

Indigenous peoples of Canada include Inuit, Metis and First Nations tribes who were the original inhabitants of the land.³ Indigenous communities can be found across all Canadian provinces and territories, with majority of them residing in Nunavut (86%) and the Northwest Territories (51%).



Government of Canada. 2020. Annual Report to Parliament 2020.

According to the 2016 Census of Canada, about 40% of the Indigenous population live on reserves. Time after time, studies have shown that Indigenous households are more likely to struggle with food security compared to non-Indigenous households in Canada.⁴

Traditional Indigenous Food Practices:

Throughout history, Indigenous Peoples have lived in harmony with nature. The land on which they reside is considered sacred and this special relationship remains true to this day. Traditionally, Indigenous diet consists of food sourced from hunting, fishery and harvesting.

The term “country foods” describes food sourced from the land.⁵

Examples of country foods are:

- moose, caribou, elk, seal, whale, buffalo, rabbit, and various species of fish and bird.⁵
- corn, squash, potatoes, beans, and tomatoes.⁶

Environmental factors such as climate change and pollution pose many risks to the safety and availability of country foods. Today, many Indigenous households incorporate a combination of traditional and store-bought foods. The increasing need for market foods impacts food security for many Indigenous communities.

Sociodemographic factors that influence food security for Indigenous communities:

•**Extreme poverty:** highest proportion within Canada with 1 in 4 Indigenous people living in impoverished conditions.⁷

•**Single-parent households:** about 1 in 3 Indigenous children aged 4 and under live with only one of their parents.⁸

•**Poor living conditions:** 1 in 5 Indigenous peoples reside in a space that requires major repairs.⁷

•Canadian data from 2016 found that **employment and education** rates among Indigenous population remains below non-Indigenous populations.⁸

Furthermore, Indigenous communities also struggle with unaffordable food cost and poor accessibility to reliable food supply. Food prices for household and grocery items are significantly higher in Indigenous communities compared to the rest of Canada. This issue is even more evident as it relates to nutritious and culturally appropriate food. Even with Northern food subsidies, fresh and healthy food is still unaffordable for many Indigenous households.⁹ Adequate food and good nutrition are vital to the day to day functioning of our bodies and overall well-being. Consequently, the lack of nutritious meals results in significant long-term effects on the health of Indigenous population.¹⁰

•**Type 2 Diabetes** affects more than 50% of Indigenous adults (>35 years old).

•**Obesity rates** continue to rise related to consumption of high sugar foods.

•**Poor overall health** among Indigenous population with increased risk of disability and lower life expectancy.

•The issue of food security in Indigenous population cannot be resolved in a single day, or even a single year.

Food security has been a long standing and complex matter that will require the collaboration and involvement of Indigenous communities and leaders; government and policy makers; businesses and stakeholders; and the support from all Canadians. The most recent Canadian reconciliation commitment and call to action acknowledges the importance that food plays in the identity and culture of Indigenous Peoples.¹¹ It brings forth the importance of “making food part of reconciliation” with improving accessibility and affordability of food for northern regions of Canada.¹²

Sysco Canada is committed to supporting the communities where we live, work and conduct business. Our purpose of “Connecting the world to share food and care for one another” keeps us grounded in our day-to-day work. As a global leader in the food supply chain, Sysco Canada has taken charge on this issue by committing to empower and promote sustainability of Indigenous communities across Canada. Sysco North was launched to address food accessibility in remote northern Indigenous communities.¹³ This new division helps to bring fresh and quality food to these remote areas at a competitive price.

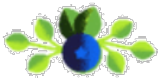
Click [here](#) to learn more about Sysco North!

Visit Sysco Canada’s [website](#) and follow Sysco Canada’s social media accounts for any updates on existing and future initiatives as we continue to live out our purpose!

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SYSCO'S PURPOSE



**CONNECTING THE WORLD TO SHARE FOOD
AND CARE FOR ONE ANOTHER**